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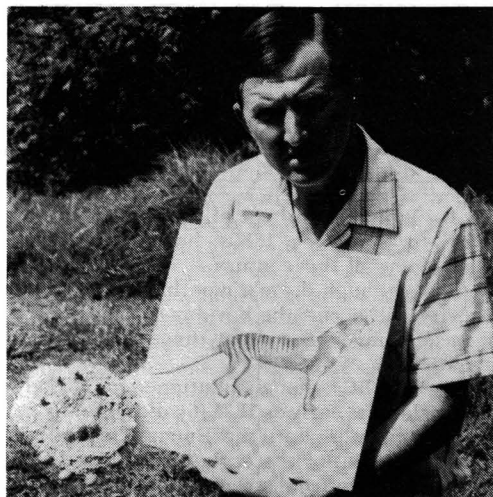


NOTES

■ 1 - Other Yowie aliases can be found in Graham Joyner: *The Hairy Man of South-Eastern Australia*. ■ 2 - Bernard Heuvelmans: *On the Track of Unknown Animals*, p.134. ■ 3 - *The Sydney Gazette* 27 Mar 1823. ■ 4 - For those who think they may be of significance, I have marked the location of three deep-space tracking stations which beam out huge amounts of microwaves in the Tidbinbilla area. I've also shown that the area is bounded to the north and west by water reservoirs, and to the east by one of Australia's largest rivers. It might also be worth mentioning that by Oz standards the Canberra area is fairly active seismically. ■ 5 - On 7 April 1974, Joan Gilbert reported seeing a Thylacine crossing Western Avenue, Branksome, Dorset (*Bournemouth Evening Echo* 7 April 1974; *Alien Animals* p.59; FT9, p19). ■ 6 - *On the Track of Unknown Animals*, p.142. ■ 7 - There are a few earlier 'tiger' stories: Paul Cropper has a single report from 1949 plus notes on a small outbreak in the 1960s.

ON THE TRAIL OF A 'TIGER'

by REX GILROY



Rex Gilroy holds a thylacine sketch and a plaster cast of one of two sets of tracks found near the Grose Valley, identified as thylacine.



Wilfred Batty with the last known 'tiger' shot in the wild. [From Beresford and Bailey: *Search for the Tasmanian Tiger* 1981.]

In June 1984, accompanied by my wife and a film crew, I was dropped by helicopter into a remote area of northern Tasmania, to investigate a report that a small colony of the Tasmanian 'tiger', or Thylacine, existed there. The expedition drew a blank, as in the past, but the search goes on.

For 25 years I have been searching the Australian bush for living proof that this "extinct" creature still survives on the mainland. There are three reasons why I believe this search is worthwhile. First, there are a lot of reports of large striped dog-like animals, possibly thylacines, coming from over a wide area of the rugged eastern Australian mountain

ranges, from far north Queensland through New South Wales to eastern Victoria. Second, plaster casts have been made of tracks found on the mainland which compare with others from Tasmania, leaving little doubt as to the animal's identity.

Third, I had a personal sighting of a thylacine. At 10.15 pm on 22 February 1972, a friend and I were driving along the Great Western Highway just south of Blackheath towards Katoomba in the rugged Blue Mountains west of Sydney, New South Wales. As we passed thick roadside scrub, an animal almost the size of a full-grown Alsatian dog, with fawn-coloured fur and a row of blackish stripes, ran across the highway in front of the car. For a few seconds it stood there in the glare of the headlights before running off into the scrub, towards the Grose Valley nearby. I have no doubt that it was a thylacine: its appearance matched that of

stuffed specimens preserved in Government museums.

A full-grown thylacine measures 2 metres from head to tail, standing about 55 cm, with a rigid kangaroo-like tail which does not wag. The body narrows at the flanks like a greyhound, and the male has a larger and thinner face than the female. Males tend to have from 9 to 11 stripes, beginning at mid-back and ending at the tail rump, while female stripes number 18 to 22, beginning at the neck base and ending at the rump. The female's pouch faces the rear, allowing her young to be protected from injury as she moves through undergrowth.

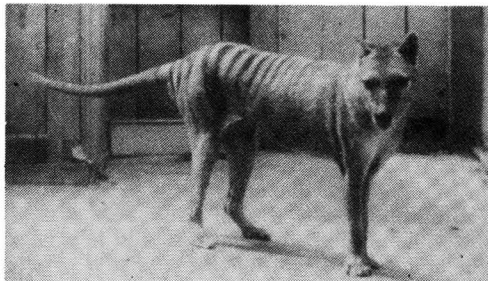
These creatures are secretive, and with the inaccessibility of their mountainous habitats it is no wonder that little evidence of their survival is available. Small colonies of four to eight individuals could exist in eastern Australia, and there might be a population of 600 or more. Their breeding habits are largely unknown, but early observations suggested mating occurs in summer when three or four young are born, although young were found in the pouch at all months of the year. The young probably have a life in the pouch of about four months and then run with the mother, hiding while she hunts for food.

The last known 'tiger' was killed by Wilfred Batty on his Mawbanna (Tasmania) farm in 1930, and the last captive specimen died in Hobart Zoo in 1934.

Sightings of thylacine-type animals have occurred throughout the Blue Mountains for generations, with at least a dozen round the town of Springwood in recent years. In 1975 one Springwood farmer reported attacks on his hencoop by a large striped dog-like animal, and almost shot it as it escaped over a fence with a hen in its mouth. In April 1983 a similar animal was reported making raids on a Kanimbla Valley farm.

In March 1982 a camper sighted a greyish creature about two metres long with about a dozen blackish stripes, drinking from a creek in the Grose Valley. I later led some naturalists on a search of the area, but we gave up after three days of fighting through the thick scrub.

North of the Grose Valley lies a vast and still largely unexplored wilderness, an eerie region of forest-covered mountains, valleys and swamps. In September 1983, I led a search into this region in a convoy of three 4-wheel drive vehicles. On a muddy bank of a remote swamp we found various marsupial tracks, including two unusual sets which resembled those of a dog but displayed marsupial features. Plaster casts were made and later matched with others found in Tasmania in 1974 whose peculiar paw struc-



The last thylacine in captivity, which died in Hobart Zoo in 1934. [Beresford and Bailey, op. cit.]

ture identified them as thylacine.

We returned to the swamp in February 1986, and found more tracks. The swamp is surrounded by dense scrub at the foot of a deep gully encased by steep cliffs. There is a maze of rock crevices and caverns in which any animal could live unseen. One set of tracks on the swamp edge show the animal had walked round the swamp's muddy bank before drinking, then retraced its steps back towards the gully.

Later, above the gully, we came across tracks of a full-grown animal, apparently female, beside which were those of a young cub. These were at least several hours old. In the dense scrub we came across signs of a wide-ranging scuffle between a wild pig and a thylacine, as indicated by dozens of tracks, which were only half an hour old. Nearby, we found a pile of day-old excrement containing pig bristles and crushed pig bone. Had it been left by a thylacine? It appears that a colony of six to eight of these creatures exists in the gully. A photographic surveillance of the swamp is being set up in the hope of capturing at least one 'tiger' on film.



The coat of arms of Tasmania, with thylacine supporters. [Beresford and Bailey, op. cit.]